

01/23/2019

Re: Professionalism of Thorndike Fire Department

To the Select Board and Residents of Thorndike,

We are reaching out in regards to several concerns that Emergency Service Agencies within Waldo County have regarding the Thorndike Fire Department. Those agencies consist of the Waldo County Fire Chiefs Association, Waldo County Firefighters Association, Waldo County EMA, and the Waldo County Regional Communication Center.

Over the past few years each of these agencies have witnessed a lack of professionalism with the former Fire Chief, now Deputy Chief George Russell. We understand that the current Thorndike Fire Chief is only there as a figurehead based on George's legal issues. Our concerns lie within his lack of training and leadership skills to the point where we are concerned for the safety of both your Firefighters and the Mutual Aid Firefighters that could fall under his leadership. We also understand from your mutual aid partners that they are looking to end their current agreements with your town due to these concerns.

Over the past year we witnessed an incident in Thorndike where fire trucks were out of service and the mutual aid towns for Thorndike were not made aware of this until a major fire broke out near your station. This caused a delay in suppression efforts until the next mutual aid town arrived on scene. The lack of communication from Thorndike Fire Department is not acceptable. Based on your contract agreement with the town of Knox and the funds received for providing fire protection, this is an unacceptable practice to not make the other towns involved in the contract aware of any service issues with apparatus that would prevent responding to their town.

We were also involved with a fire call where firefighter's lives were unnecessarily put in danger due to non-working equipment and lack of training. Firefighters entered a house fire with an attack line only to find out that it did not work properly and the Pump Operator was not qualified to run a new truck to your fleet.

We have also taken many complaints from the Waldo County Regional Communication Center in reference to the use of the radios during these incidents and how out of control they get. This has resulted in the delay of mutual aid responding because they are unable to use the radio frequency.

All of these agencies have offered their assistance with training classes and as mentors with no success. We will no longer turn a blind eye to this situation and will not put our members at risk under George's leadership. We have tried to support Seth in his efforts to turn this around but cannot support George due to his criminal history and lack of leadership. Please understand this is not intended to be a threat but a warning to help prevent injury, or worse, death of anyone due to a careless or inexperienced decision.

We have also recently heard that there is a change in leadership with your department. This is once again a change to the Chiefs position with no change to the 2nd in command. We are quite surprised to see a young firefighter with a few years on other services recently receive a promotion to the rank of Captain. This only emphasizes the lack of true leadership and experience that could lead to an accident.

In 2018 the Waldo County Firefighter Associations training committee received registrations from Thorndike Fire School for 4 firefighters to take our Basic Fire School. The cost per student is \$250.00 for this interior firefighting training with 16 other students registered from around the county. In good faith we furnished this training to each student and upon completion of the class in May we sent their certificates along with a bill for the \$1000.00 to Thorndike. At this point the association has still not received payment.

In closing we would like to reiterate that we are here to assist in the improvement of all emergency agencies within Waldo County including Thorndike. We also support your decision to not reappoint George as Chief. Unfortunately this has not resulted in him stepping down and doing the honorable thing. We owe it to the residents of Thorndike and mutual aid towns to have trained and trustworthy first responders assisting them in their time of need.

It is important for you to understand the impact that this is having on Waldo County.

Respectfully,

Waldo County Firefighters Association - President Ken Clements

Waldo County Fire Chiefs Association – President Bill Gillespie

Waldo County EMA – Director Dale Rowley

Waldo County Communications Center – Director Owen Smith